



Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services

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Randall W. Williams, MD, FACOG
Director



Michael L. Parson
Governor

January 11, 2021

Dear Colleague:

As you may know, Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) is a silent epidemic impacting nearly 2.4 million persons in the United States¹. Unfortunately, 4 in 10 people with hepatitis C do not know they are infected². Consequently, these undiagnosed persons do not receive evaluation, effective care, or treatment of viral hepatitis. They also remain chronically at risk for progression of liver disease, liver failure, and hepatocellular carcinoma. Hepatitis C is a public health concern, and transmission from person-to-person can only be diminished with identification, education, and treatment. Hepatitis C is now curable in over 90% of typical patients¹.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated their screening recommendation for HCV in March 2020. The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services urges all primary care practices to implement the CDC' recommendations for screening patients at risk for HCV.

The below populations should be screened as follows³:

Universal hepatitis C screening³:

- Hepatitis C screening at least once in a lifetime for all adults aged 18 years and older
- Hepatitis C screening for all pregnant women during each pregnancy

One-time hepatitis C testing regardless of age or setting prevalence among people with recognized conditions or exposures³:

- People with HIV
- People who ever injected drugs and shared needles, syringes, or other drug preparation equipment, including those who injected once or a few times many years ago
- People with selected medical conditions, including:
 - people who ever received maintenance hemodialysis
 - people with persistently abnormal ALT levels
- Prior recipients of transfusions or organ transplants, including:
 - people who received clotting factor concentrates produced before 1987
 - people who received a transfusion of blood or blood components before July 1992
 - people who received an organ transplant before July 1992
 - people who were notified that they received blood from a donor who later tested positive for HCV infection
- Healthcare, emergency medical, and public safety personnel after needle sticks, sharps, or mucosal exposures to HCV-positive blood
- Children born to mothers with HCV infection

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The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services will be the leader in promoting, protecting and partnering for health.

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY / AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER: Services provided on a nondiscriminatory basis.

Routine periodic testing for people with ongoing risk factors, while risk factors persist:

- People who currently inject drugs and share needles, syringes, or other drug preparation equipment
- People with selected medical conditions, including:
 - people who ever received maintenance hemodialysis

More than half of people who become infected with HCV will develop chronic infection¹. Of every 100 people infected with HCV, about 5-25 will develop liver cirrhosis within 10-20 years¹. Treatment is curative and easy to tolerate. Also, insurance and Medicaid/Medicare is covering patients earlier in the disease process.

More comprehensive screening combined with improved treatments would result in a cost-effective decrease in hepatitis-related morbidity and mortality. Missouri primary care practices can improve patient outcomes by implementing recommended HCV screening. When screening your at-risk patients for hepatitis C, ensure the HCV Antibody lab order reflexes to an HCV RNA. This test is necessary to determine if your patients have an active virus. You can order the Hepatitis C Antibody with Reflex to HCV, RNA, Quantitative PCR [(Quest 8472, CPT code: 86803) and (LabCorp 144050, CPT code 86803)].

A specialist is not always required to treat hepatitis C. Missouri Show-Me ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) is available for hepatitis C treatment guidance and assistance for providers, if needed. You may contact Show-Me ECHO at 573-884-3847 for more information.

Thank you for your dedication to patient care, for decreasing healthcare costs by incorporating HCV screening into your practice, and most importantly, for saving lives. If you have questions please contact the Viral Hepatitis Prevention Program at (573) 751-6439 or email hepatitis@health.mo.gov.

Sincerely,



Randall W. Williams, MD, FACOG
Director



D. Adam Crumbliss
DCPH Division Director



Alicia Jenkins, Interim Chief
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Sara Davenport, Chief
Office of Rural Health and Primary Care

References:

1. "Hepatitis C Questions and Answers for Health Professionals" *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. Accessed 02 September 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/hcvfaq.htm>
2. "Vital Signs Dramatic increases in hepatitis C-". *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. Accessed 02 September 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/vitalsigns/pdf/hepatitisc-vitalsigns-april2020-H.pdf>
3. "Testing Recommendations for Hepatitis C Virus Infection" *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. Accessed 02 September 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/guidelinesc.htm>